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THE DUTIES OF THE STUDENT ADVISER

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The very machinery of a large high school so engrosses the time and attention of the administrative officers that there is left, oftentimes, to no one in particular the responsibility of the direction and guidance of the individual pupil and even of the student body. In order to meet this pressing need there has been appointed in many high schools a student adviser whose duty it is to assist the administration by taking the initiative in the direction of the social activities and who, with the co-operation of the teachers and administrative officers, shares the responsibility for the moral guidance, the physical welfare, and the progress of pupils in the studies pursued. The creation of this position has grown out of a realization of the necessity for more socialization of the student body and for a closer relationship between teacher and pupil.

The problems with which the student adviser is confronted are so varied and so individual that it is very difficult to classify them in any comprehensive way. Perhaps, general supervision of the girls in all their many relations would best describe the main responsibility. Just as important and absorbing is the adviser's share in determining the policies of the school in the direction and supervision of social activities, in bridging the gap between the school and the home, in vocational guidance, in co-operating with teachers and outside agencies, in stimulating and encouraging pupils concerning academic matters, and in welfare work.

The means of handling these problems are determined by the personality of the adviser, the organization and character of the school, and the equipment furnished. However, there are certain requisites which are essential for the proper functioning of this position in any school. The student adviser must be a woman of marked initiative who possesses qualities which inspire confidence. She must assume leadership and responsibility. As far as the

organization is concerned, there must be a clear definition of the work so that everyone in the school understands the duties of the student adviser. In order to avoid friction she must have complete charge of all matters for which she is responsible. It is also necessary for the student adviser to have an office, equipped with at least a desk, a telephone, and filing cases.

The specific ways of solving the problems of the student adviser must vary in different schools. An attempt will be made to give in detail the procedure which is followed in the East High School, Cincinnati. When the New East High School was opened in 1919, the writer was given the opportunity to help organize this work and to select the equipment for the department. The large office is supplied with all necessary furniture—filing cabinet, telephone, and typewriter. The two rest rooms, with connecting lavatories, are located on opposite sides of the office. These rooms are equipped with day-beds, three for the girls and two for the boys, comfortable chairs, a cabinet which holds first-aid supplies, blankets, and towels.

It is necessary to have a girl in charge of the office each period during the day to relieve the student adviser of many minor matters and to make it possible for her to be away from the office. Reliable, capable girls are chosen for this responsibility and are trained as soon as school opens to carry out the definite instructions in a uniform way. The girls consider it an honor to be granted this privilege and ask to be put on a waiting list so that they can be appointed as soon as a vacancy occurs. In addition to the girls who assume general charge of the office, third-year girls in the commercial course volunteer to spend a certain number of periods each week in typing records and doing other stenographic work. The third-year pupils need the practice more than the Seniors who are generally too busy to give any extra time. We have found that this responsibility is valuable for the development of good judgment, initiative, and leadership. It enables the student adviser to establish very intimate relationship with a definite group of pupils and to secure their co-operation and help in many school policies.

The general supervision of the girls is brought about in many ways. All girls who have been absent and all who are tardy report

to the student adviser. Here is a good opportunity to train girls to form habits of punctuality and dependability. The absence of each girl is investigated either by calling the home over the telephone; by writing letters; by asking some trustworthy friend, if there is no telephone; or by visiting the home if that seems expedient. This type of investigation has been greatly appreciated by parents, has decreased the number of absentees, and has practically eliminated truancy. The record of tardiness and absence is kept by the student adviser with the help of pupils. Very little time is required for this, the amount of course depending on the number of absentees, but it furnishes much information which could not be obtained if the record were kept by a clerk. The cause for each absence is recorded above the absence mark by a system of symbols devised for the purpose—S for sickness, MS for mother sick, N for needed at home, etc. If this record were kept by other officers of the school, many cases would not be called to the attention of the student adviser promptly enough to be dealt with effectively.

All girls who ask to be excused before the close of school must secure permission to leave the building. All pupils, both boys and girls, who are sick or who have been injured come to the rest room. Very few are sent home because the great majority are able to return to their classes after one or more periods. Many boys require first aid either for minor injuries or for torn clothing. Records are kept of each time a pupil is allowed to leave early or is given permission to remain in the rest room. These cumulative record cards have been valuable in several ways. In the first place, attention is called to the fact that there is need for medical advice if a pupil spends much time in the rest room. Such cases are investigated; the home is visited if necessary; and often appointments are made with specialists through numerous clinics. The parents generally consult their family physician and have the trouble taken care of at once. Secondly, the privilege of using these rooms and of being excused early is not abused.

Personal interviews constitute the most important part of the work. One is thus able to gain the confidence of the individual and to understand the particular trouble. Boys and girls often seek advice in regard to physical ailments. Teachers refer to the

student adviser all cases in which they suspect the need of medical attention for such ailments as near-sightedness, skin trouble, malnourishment, defective or neglected teeth, enlarged tonsils, adenoids, chronic colds, etc. It is amazing to see how anxious the pupils are to have such conditions remedied. If parents are unable to pay for medical service, arrangements are made with reliable doctors to have the work done free of charge. When glasses must be bought for indigent pupils, they are purchased with money from a school fund which has been created for this purpose.

Students occasionally ask for help in straightening out family troubles. This is without doubt the hardest problem of all, because it necessitates many visits to the home and generally co-operation with one or more agencies. When there are mentally defective parents to deal with, the difficulties encountered are most perplexing. In some cases, the home condition can be greatly improved by supervision over a long period of time.

Scholarships are secured for superior children who, in order to remain in school, must have more money than can be earned by them. There are definite requirements which they must satisfy before scholarships are granted. In each case many conferences and visits to the home are necessary in order to keep in close contact with the pupil. There is often need for furnishing lunches, car-fare, and supplies used in classes. Such cases are discovered by various means and investigated through friendly talks and visits to the home. The money for this purpose is available from the Student Welfare Fund.

Committees of pupils who want to give parties of various kinds often seek advice concerning their plans before they ask for the principal's permission. Such interviews are encouraged because tactful suggestions at that stage save many disappointments.

Pupils are interviewed concerning their attitude toward school, lack of interest, failure, and dissatisfaction with school work. The follow-up system connected with this phase requires much time and resourcefulness, necessitates knowledge of home conditions and parental control as well as the co-operation of the parents and teachers concerned.

Cases involving inappropriate dress, indiscreet conduct on the part of the girls, and occasionally offensive uncleanness of both

boys and girls are reported by teachers and pupils. In such personal matters the utmost tact must be used, and the pupil must feel that the purpose of the interview is to help and not to criticize. A careful study of each case, including investigation of the cause, must be made so that it will be possible to appeal to the pride of the individual and to lead him to understand wherein the trouble lies, whether it is due to faulty home training, ignorance, or inferior moral standards.

The student adviser is able to be of great service by supplying clothing when there is a need. Several women have given us quantities of good, attractive clothing for indigent pupils. It is always possible to find clothing when there is an urgent need, if enough energy is expended. The peculiar bond of sympathy established with pupils in this way possesses a more intimate and enduring quality, and there is developed a deeper feeling of confidence and appreciation than the writer has ever found in any other relation with pupils. Every effort should be made to preserve the pride of the individual.

In the routine work of interviewing girls who have been reported absent from a recitation or a study-hall during the preceding day, one has an opportunity to learn the attitude of the girls and to teach them to live up to the high standards required in the school. We have a thorough system of checking up on absences from each recitation and study-hall every period during the day. The actual checking up of the girls is done after school by a responsible pupil under the supervision of the student adviser. The work has been systematized so that very little time is required. Since the school is responsible for pupils from half-past eight in the morning until half-past two in the afternoon, it is our duty to make certain that all pupils are accounted for during that time. Under this plan cutting classes and leaving the building without permission are reduced to a minimum.

In every school where boys and girls of the adolescent age are assembled will be found the problems arising from social relationships. Constant vigilance and cautious guidance are successful preventives of many serious troubles. Affairs of any consequence must be neither neglected nor overlooked, because delays are often disastrous. When one is cognizant of the important facts, the whole

matter should be frankly discussed with the pupil or pupils concerned. A most conscientious effort should be made to teach the pupils to understand the dangers and consequences. In most cases parents should be informed of any imprudent conduct on the part of their children, and it is always judicious to secure their co-operation.

Throughout the year, talks are given to small groups of the girls on matters pertaining to general conduct, appearance, and personal hygiene. We feel that these talks are worth while, especially for the fourth-year commercial girls who are planning to work in offices as soon as they graduate. Although it is a large undertaking to reach all of the girls by taking small groups, the results seem to warrant the effort.

The student adviser confers with the principal, assistant principal, and interested teachers in regard to school policies. Last year we succeeded in creating the proper school sentiment among the girls concerning appropriate and sensible clothes for school and business. Under the leadership of the student adviser, the most prominent girls in the school planned an auditorium period in which they arranged and carried out the program. An explanation of the desired policy, followed by a style show illustrating the correct kinds of dress for school, produced the psychological moment for an expression of the opinion of the girls. The committee in charge sent a letter to each girl who expected to enter the East High School as a Freshman in the fall. This letter welcomed them, explained the policy which had just been adopted, and asked for their support.

We are able to obtain many worth-while results through the co-operation of the committees from the home-room organizations. For example, the house committee assumes the oversight of the toilet rooms to see that the walls are not defaced and that soap and towels are not wasted.

It is the duty of the student adviser to take the initiative in vocational guidance because she is the logical person to connect with the Centralized Vocation Bureau. She has the opportunity for personal counseling with those pupils who intend to withdraw from school. She is able to co-operate with the psychological laboratory and with the work certificate and placement office. Very often the data which have been collected in the school for each pupil prove to be valuable material for this office.

Some one person besides the principal must assume responsibility for social activities and keep in close touch with the real conditions, so the general direction and supervision of these affairs fall to the lot of the student adviser. We decided to replace the regular dance with a party so arranged that all pupils should share in the enjoyment. It took a great deal of propaganda to convince some pupils that the plan would be successful, but after the first party it was declared far superior to the dance in which only a few popular girls and boys have a chance to participate. The elaborate plans for more formal entertainments give excellent training to the pupils in charge. It is imperative that the student adviser attend all athletic contests, because her presence serves to check indiscreet conduct and brings her in very close relationship with boys and girls. For the writer this has been more instrumental than anything else in obtaining the good-will and confidence of the boys.

It has long been recognized that the gap between the school and home should be bridged. Teachers have been urged to visit the homes of their pupils so that they may become acquainted with the parents and understand the home conditions, but the majority either cannot find the time or are not inclined to do this. It is essential for the student adviser to visit the homes. She must know the heredity and environment of the pupil before she can attempt a solution of his special problem. So when pupils are referred to her for withdrawal, vocational counseling, troublesome behavior, or dishonesty, quite frequently a visit to the home must be made. Whenever pupils come to her for advice or help about home conditions, it is obvious what must be done. Chronic cases of absence, and problems involving moral or physical welfare require a thorough knowledge of home conditions before one is justified in trying to effect a remedy. Records are kept for future reference.

Co-operation with the teachers is a vital part of the student adviser's work. She must always be ready to help the teachers adjust their difficulties and to bring about a better relationship between teacher and pupil. The physical education department and the student adviser have much in common—for example, discovering cases needing medical attention, training pupils of defective physical development, and excusing from gymnasium

work, temporarily or permanently. The value of encouraging pupils to participate in games, exercises, and contests can hardly be overestimated.

The nature of these many responsibilities necessitates co-operation with such agencies and institutions as the Vocation Bureau, juvenile and probate courts, Associated Charities, Jewish and Catholic organizations, clinics, Anti-Tuberculosis League, and the Juvenile Protective Association.

The student adviser must be interested in the academic problems of the individual pupil, in the progress made, and in the difficulties encountered. Often adjustments must be made for the failures and for those who are dissatisfied. High scholastic attainments must be recognized and rewarded in every possible way. Too many opportunities cannot be given to the potential leaders of tomorrow to develop initiative and to assume responsibility.

The results from the proper functioning of this position should be beneficial to pupils, parents, teachers, and principal. Personal and prompt attention given to the many and varied requests of the pupils creates the desired feeling of confidence on the part of the boys and girls, so that they will not hesitate to seek advice and help whenever these are needed. Friendly relationship established between the school and home secures the co-operation of the parents. Teachers should be encouraged to refer to the student adviser those problems which they cannot handle satisfactorily. Last but not least in importance, the principal is relieved of many minor administrative duties and hence has more time to give to the affairs which are his chief concern.